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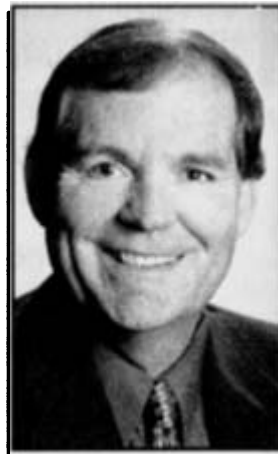


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**We know we're a great place,  
but are we a Great Place?**

**D**oes the Decorah-Winneshiek County area have what it takes to be selected as a pilot community for the Iowa Great Places program?

Most everyone agrees we are a great place so the question becomes, "Are we a Great Place, with a capital G and a capital P?"

Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack's Great Places initiative is designed to make good or great places into Great Places. As such, local economic development, city, tourism and Chamber representatives are among those planning to attend a May 17 conference in Clear Lake that will tell more about the program.



Randy Uhl

If selected as a pilot community, Decorah-Winneshiek County would have the assistance of state government agencies working together as true partners to stimulate ideas and planning, to help leverage local and private resources and to share technical expertise.

But being selected as a pilot presents numerous and steep challenges. Pilot communities are those characterized by seven basic "dimensions" as outlined by the state. The dimensions include the following:

- Does the community value its historical roots while embracing a shared vision that welcomes and includes both natives and newcomers?
- Does the community provide and support authentic, credible and varied opportunities for individual and community expression? In other words, are there adequate arts, recreational and lifelong learning opportunities?
- Does the community promote and encourage social interaction, with equal opportunity for all people to interact? This category includes questions about how the community welcomes newcomers and how people are involved in both governmental and non-governmental decision-making.
- Does the community have a good mix of small businesses and large? Is there evidence of support for and opportunities for business development (business parks, venture capital, supportive



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regulatory environment including zoning, building permitting, streamlined processes, etc.)?

- Does the community offer a pleasing environment? Are systems in place to protect and sustain environmental quality and is there a growth plan that addresses the balance between aesthetic elements and infrastructure needs?

- Is there a strong infrastructure in place for the community? Is there adequate planning for and

improvement of infrastructure systems in the community?

- Is there a creative culture in the community? Are problems solved creatively? Is there evidence of support for creative entrepreneurs, and outreach to new entrepreneurs?

The timing of these questions is interesting for Winneshiek County Development Inc. (WCDI) because the organization is initiating a strategic planning process that encompasses many of these same concerns.

- The first formal step in the WCDI planning process involved inviting more than 20 community residents, primarily those in their 20s and 30s, to share concerns about the future of our community. The information-seeking session was held in the remarkable Round Table Room at Luther College, a facility that enables a group to provide a day's worth of brainstorming ideas in just a couple of hours.

Questions such as "Looking ahead 10 years, the most important goals for our community should be..." or "Our community's future would be brighter if ..." or "I would feel more connected to the community if ..."

The following recommendations from the spirited brainstorming session occurred most frequently:

- The need for a community center (pool, gym, track, meeting room, weights)
- Improved child care, including more for-profit providers
- Preserving the natural beauty/environment
- Improving technology, such as increased broadband service
- Getting young people more involved in government and organizations such as WCDI and Decorah Area Chamber of Commerce
- Seeing more respect among the community, with diverse opinions but productive dialogue as well
- A review of the community/comprehensive plan
- More job opportunities for young people

The input from this Round Table group is very valuable whether the information provided is to be





used to apply for the community to become a Great Place pilot, or whether it is simply used to help our community continue as a great place.

Regardless of the use, WCDI welcomes additional planning information from the public.

We encourage you to give WCDI a call at 382-6061 or e-mail [wcdi@alpinecom.net](mailto:wcdi@alpinecom.net) if you have opinions about the future of our community's economic health, or if you are interested in sharing those opinions at or before the May 17 conference in Clear Lake.



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